

Wycombe Wanderers 4, Brighton Reserves 1

By STUART EARP

TRAILING 1-0 at the interval, Wycombe Wanderers pulled out a spirited second half recovery and rammed four goals past Brighton Reserves in Saturday's friendly at Loakes Park. The Blues' victory must put them in good heart for next Saturday's visit to Rothmans Isthmian League leaders Enfield.

With such an important game just over the horizon, Wanderers fielded their full strength side but for the first 45 minutes, found themselves in trouble against a small but skilful Brighton side, unbeaten in their last eight matches.

Their cause was not helped when Dylan Evans had to leave the field with a back injury, substitute Ray Eaton coming on in midfield with Mick Holifield switching to the front line.

Brighton were soon spraying the ball around confidently, finding lots of space with intelligent running. Their pace exposed weaknesses in the home defence and they took only 10 minutes to go ahead. John Maskell's weak goalkick was headed straight back towards him from midfield and Ward outstripped the defence to drive home.

With Geoff Anthony holding onto the ball too long in the first half, Wanderers were frequently caught in possession but one glorious move almost gave them an equaliser after 24 minutes. Maskell sent a massive goalkick downfield which Tony Horseman headed on to Holifield. He returned the ball to "Bodger" whose angled shot finished just past the far post.

Poor finishing let Wycombe down on several occasions in the first half with Howard Kennedy and Eaton both missing chance before the break. Holifield's pace once took him right through the Brighton cover but goalkeeper Smith came out well to smother the shot.

In the second half, Wanderers showed a marked improvement all round. The passing was crisper and more accurate while there was a good deal more urgency in their play. But above all it was the finishing that really proved decisive.

The equaliser was a rather scrambled effort in the 53rd minute. Kennedy drove a free kick into the defensive wall and the ball came out to Keith Mead who crossed perfectly into the middle. Brighton failed to clear the danger in their six yard box and Horseman drove the ball high into the net.

Niggling fouls from Brighton and too much whistle from referee Robinson threatened to spoil the game in the second half but Wanderers had the visitors' goal firmly in their sights and piled on considerable pressure. Horseman's consistent finishing put the Blues ahead after 65 minutes when Holifield challenged for the ball and put Horseman through on the edge of the box. Although Mick's foot was dangerously high, the referee allowed play to continue and Horseman lifted the ball over Smith's diving body.

Dave Alexander replaced Dave Bullock soon afterwards, Eaton taking over at left back after a hard working midfield performance. It was Ray who laid on the third goal after 67 minutes. He took a corner on the top wing and curled a precise cross right onto the head of John Delaney, standing on the goal-line. John simply turned his head and nodded home.

With Anthony improving considerably up front, Wanderers continued to look dangerous although Maskell was forced to pull off a fine save in the 79th minute. Jones' intended shot turned into a pass for Ward, but Maskell saved the day by blocking the shot with his legs.

Three minutes later, Holifield hammered home the fourth goal after yet another brilliant piece of work by Horseman. The ball was played out of defence to Wycombe's leading scorer who took the ball through the scanty Brighton defence. With only the keeper to beat, most players would have tried a shot but Horseman, intelligently spotting another player in a better scoring position, unselfishly crossed into the middle for Holifield to rifle home.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, D. Bullock (sub. D. Alexander 65 mins); H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Holifield; D. Evans (sub. R. Aton 7 mins.), A. Horseman, G. Anthony.

BRIGHTON: P. Smith; F. Fraser, N. Martin, S. Piper, R. Sopp; S. Ward (sub. D. Eley 73 mins.), T. Mason, K. Deakin; M. Jones, P. Ward, S. Murphy. Sub. R. Madden (not used).

Referee: B. Robinson.

Half time: 0-1. **Goalscorers,** Wycombe — Horseman 2 (53, 60), Delaney (67), Holifield (82). Brighton — P. Ward (10).

Official attendance: 690.